



GAMES FAQ

Q I've heard that the Xbox 360 is a Media Center Extender, but what does this mean and how do I use it?

A A Media Center Extender is a device that can talk to Windows XP Media Center Edition and stream content from it over a network. The Xbox

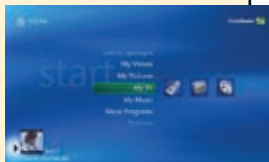
360 has this function built in. To get it working, you'll need a network, a Media Center PC and an 81MB update for the PC, which is available from www.xbox.com.

Once it's working, your Xbox displays the Media Center interface on your TV. Using the joy pad or remote, you can access all the same media, including live TV and recordings, exactly as though the data was stored on the Xbox.

You'll need a fast wireless network, or preferably wired Ethernet, to stream video. But the installation wizard performs a network test automatically to see if the technology will work, so you can try it over wireless first.

It works really well, and it's handy for distributing your media to a different room where the Media Center isn't located, such as a bedroom.

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▲ You can view all your Media Center's media on your Xbox if you install the Extender patch on your PC

REVIEW FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

ACTIVISION Call of Duty 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £21 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.com

DETAILS www.callofduty.com



The original Call of Duty was the most exciting and scary World War II game we had ever seen, but this second version goes one better.

The game's graphics are much slicker. Damaged towns, people and vehicles are all more detailed. The effects are stunning, with realistic snow fall, dust storms and haze caused by burning buildings and vehicles. But it's the character animation that really brings the game to life. Troops move exactly as they would while carrying heavy packs, and act as if they don't want to get shot. Pushing forwards sees your comrades hiding behind crates and peering round doorways. The enemy is just as good, and the AI is superb. If it looks as if you're losing a battle, they push forwards, and if you start winning they turn and run for their lives, leaving you to shoot them in the back.

One of the best additions is the ability to climb over obstacles that were too high in the previous game. This makes advancing on a position much easier, as you don't have to expose yourself to unnecessary gunfire. But the Germans can do exactly the same and we were frequently caught out by enemy troops climbing up to our supposedly secure position. Sound is stunning, from loud explosions to the echo confines of an enemy bunker. Play it with headphones on and it's as close to being in a real battle zone as you'd care to get.

As with the original, you can play as British, Russian and American troops. Whereas the previous game jumped around between the three nationalities, Call of Duty 2 lets you play each one



The town planners of Russia had a big job ahead of them

all the way through. You start as the Russians but once you've unlocked the British and American missions you can switch to them manually. The Russian missions are the best, with the battles in Stalingrad proving the most scary and difficult. All the missions are enjoyable, though, and once you start you'll want to keep going until you've finished.

Call of Duty 2 introduces a new method of taking damage: there's no health bar, but when you get shot you become injured. Take another shot when you're injured, and you die; find cover, and you recover your health.

The multiplayer modes are transported from the original along with the maps, but beefed up to match the new look. There's a wider range of weaponry, though, including our personal favourite, the trench gun. You can keep yourself amused online long after you've completed the single-player missions.

There may be plenty of World War II games on the market, but this is the best by a long shot.

David Ludlow



Excellent graphics; exciting



Quick to complete

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 3.4GB disk space

HOTLIST STRATEGY GAME

Civilization IV

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.2kgames.com



Civilization IV shows us that there's life left in the god game genre. Using its turn-based play, you have time to think out detailed strategies before launching into an attack.

With plenty of building and town planning thrown in for good measure, this is an enthralling game that will keep you occupied for months.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.2GHz processor, 64MB RAM, 1.7GB disk space. **Product code** B0009XH4CK



HOTLIST GOD GAME

Black & White 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £20 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.com

DETAILS www.eagames.com



Black and White 2 is a huge improvement on the original, allowing you to play God as you hold sway over your people. Your aim is to conquer the map, but you can do it peacefully by attracting people or building a bigger army. The graphics are stunning, and the choice between being good or evil means there's lots to like no matter what style of gaming you prefer.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 3.5GB disk space. **Product code** EAR07704900IS



HOTLIST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

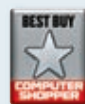
F.E.A.R.

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.specialreserve.co.uk

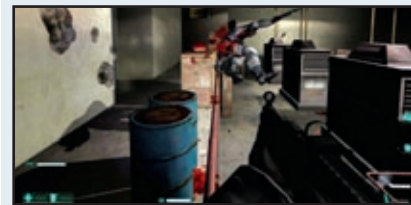
DETAILS www.whatisfear.com



An eclectic mix of styles, F.E.A.R. is one of the best and most frightening first-person shooters available. The graphics are stunning, with lifelike shadows and walls exploding with bullet impacts.

The horror theme starts to run out of steam during the final levels, but the rest of the game is so good that you won't care.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space. **Product code** B00080FCY6





REVIEW PLATFORM GAME

ELECTRONIC ARTS Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.comDETAILS www.ea.com

The latest game in the Harry Potter series lets you play as Harry, Ron and Hermione in their fourth year at Hogwarts. It's an exciting-looking game, the characters look just like their onscreen counterparts and the actors do the voice work, too. It's as close to entering Harry's world as you're likely to get.

The gameplay is easy to pick up. There is context-sensitive spell casting: point at a boulder and you'll pick it up, point at the fire and you'll spray water from your wand to extinguish it. This makes most of the problem-solving quite simplistic, though, as pointing your wand in the right direction and hitting the right spell key usually does the trick. Still, there's plenty of fun to be had and enough to keep kids entertained. A range of nasty creatures attack you in the game, and if you don't want to defeat them by cursing them with your wand, you can be more inventive and drop rocks on them or throw them off ledges.

In previous games, you had to swap between characters and their various abilities to complete a level. But in *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry, Hermione and Ron all have the same abilities. You still get to choose which one you want to control, and the other two are taken over by the computer. You can have up to three players working together on the same PC, but you'll need two game pads if you do.

The graphics are lush, particularly the backgrounds. Play the level where you roam the roof of Hogwarts, and you'll be amazed by the school's size and complexity as it fills the screen. Camera angles can be confusing, though, and you'll often be attacked by off-screen creatures. Still, this is a fun game that kids will love to play.

David Ludlow

✓ Beautiful environment; fun levels

✗ Confusing camera angles; very easy

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.2GHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space. **Product code** EAE07704778IS



Harry Potter turns baddie spotter with the help of Hermione – he's glad he's got her

REVIEW ACTION GAME

ATARI The Matrix: Path of Neo

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.comDETAILS www.thematrixpathofneo.com

After several games that put you in control of bit-part characters, *The Matrix: Path of Neo* puts you in control of The One, as you follow the events in all three Matrix films.

All the major events in the film are there. Like the first film, you start off trying to escape from agents who've come to your office. The game diverts a little, as you manage to escape in this version. This isn't a problem, though; many games need filling out from their movie counterparts to make the levels feel interesting enough to play.

Next, you're trained in your abilities and weapons. This takes much longer than in the film, but it adds excitement to the game. We also liked the way the first Kung Fu training mission takes place in the same underground bunker as used in *Enter the Dragon*.

Fighting requires a combination of the mouse and keyboard, but it's easy to pick up. Within minutes, you'll be pulling off impressive combinations of moves against scores of opponents. However, it is quite easy to get overwhelmed. Some of the fights are a mess of bodies filling the screen. It can also be a bit tricky getting used to the special functions, such as running up walls, and we spent a lot of time mistiming jumps and falling to the floor.

It doesn't help that the graphics aren't that good. They're functional, but they look a couple of years out of date and lack the level of detail we'd expect from a modern title. The cut scenes are quite confusing and you can't skip them.

Still, there's much to like. The frantic action combined with the ability to play the best parts of the films makes up for a lot. This might just get you excited about *The Matrix* all over again.

David Ludlow

✓ You can play as Neo; easy to pick up

✗ You can't skip cut scenes; graphics look outdated

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 6GB disk space. **Product code** B0009RWHNM



New equal opportunities laws mean that even men with only one foot can now become agents

REVIEW ACTION GAME

UBISOFT Peter Jackson's King Kong

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.game.co.ukDETAILS www.ubi.com

A giant ape and an island full of dinosaurs can mean only one thing: King Kong. The game follows the same events as the new Peter Jackson film on which it is based, and you can play as both man and King Kong.

The graphics lack the beauty and detail of *Call of Duty 2* or *F.E.A.R.* (see our Hotlist, below left) but they are still pretty good. Skull island is rendered in all its glory and the surrounding landscape looks great. The character animation is excellent. The dinosaurs look amazing and Kong is truly something to behold. Amazingly, the characters look a lot like the actors who star in the film, particularly Jack Black who plays Carl Denham.

The game is a first-person shooter, but it's not as easy to play as other games in the genre. You don't have your gun at the ready all the time and you must press the space bar to start aiming. You can carry only one gun, but you can pick up spears along the way. However, a spear automatically overrides your gun and there's no way to switch manually between the two; you have to throw the spear away.

This is one of the simplest games we've played in a long time. The levels have obvious routes through them and the problems, which mostly consist of burning grass or finding levers, are very easy to solve. The King Kong sections of the game, which are sadly few and far between, are just as simple but a lot more fun. Raining your ape fury on all manner of strange beasts has never been so gratifying. We would have liked more of the Kong action.

You'll probably get through this game in an afternoon, but it's a lot of fun to play and it looks great. A bit more variety would have done it the world of good, though.

David Ludlow

✓ Excellent graphics; fun to play as Kong

✗ Strange controls; not enough Kong

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE or above, 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1GB disk space. **Product code** 2203528



The first few attempts at dinosaur shish kebabs didn't quite go according to plan



REVIEW ACTION GAME

BVG

The Chronicles of Narnia:
The Lion, The Witch and The
Wardrobe

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.co.ukDETAILS www.narniathegame.com/uk

This game is based on the film adaptation of the CS Lewis book *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. You play as Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy as you battle the evil White Witch in the world of Narnia.

As is typical for games based on films, this is a third-person action game. While many film-to-game adaptations have failed, this one has genuine appeal. The cut scenes are taken directly from the film. When it's your turn to take over, the game switches from film footage to the in-game engine, letting you pick up exactly where the film left off. The graphics are slick and beautifully detailed, and the game should run nicely on most PCs.

Each of your characters has unique abilities, and the levels are carefully designed to make sure you need every one of them to progress. You'll need Lucy or Edmund to find a safe path over ice as they are the lightest, while Peter's strength makes him ideal for battling the hordes of nasty creatures.

This game is primarily aimed at children, and gives helpful onscreen hints telling you how to solve the various problems. It also puts character icons on objects, so you know which character should be used. This makes the game quite easy from a problem-solving point of view, but it's still great fun and quite a challenge to follow the instructions successfully.

Part of this game's charm lies in its diverse levels, which range from large-scale battles to sliding on ice down a ravine. It's always fun to play, and the levels are the perfect length to keep the kids entertained. Seasoned players will finish it in no time, but this is an excellent game for children.

David Ludlow

✓ Brilliant fun; varied action

✗ Perhaps a bit easy

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.5GHz Pentium 4 processor, 256MB RAM, 4GB disk space. **Product code** GU6A0039AA



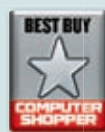
The giant was the least of Peter's problems. More pressing was the need for stylish skiing outfits

REVIEW GAMES CONSOLE

MICROSOFT
Xbox 360 Premium

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £280 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.simplygames.comDETAILS www.xbox.com

The original Xbox was little more than a PC dressed up as a games console, but the new Xbox 360 is a games console through and through. It uses a brand new IBM Xenon processor with three cores, each running at 3.2GHz. PCs are currently lagging behind with a maximum of two processor cores, as seen in Intel's Pentium 8xxD series and AMD's Athlon 64 X2s. It also has a custom ATI graphics chipset that's running at 500MHz.

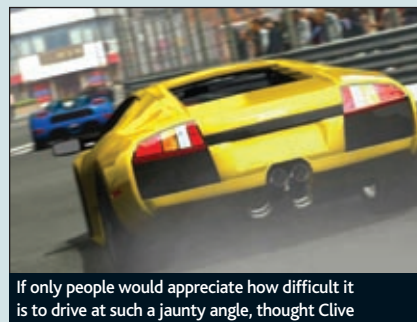
We got our hands on an Xbox 360 Premium, a top-of-the-range model with a 20GB hard disk, wireless control pad, component video cable and remote control. There's also a Core version available for £210 including VAT, which doesn't have a hard disk or remote control and has only a wired game pad.

You can upgrade from the Core edition to the Premium by buying the extra bits, but we don't think it's worth it. If you're going to buy an Xbox 360, you should go for the Premium edition. The hard disk alone is worth it for saving games, and you can download arcade classics via your Xbox Live account. Ideally, though, you'll need a High Definition (HD) LCD TV, so you can play games at HD resolutions. On a normal TV, you're not going to get the same quality of images. Believe us, they look stunning.

EASY RIDER

Project Gotham Racing 3 is the latest driving game in the series and it looks unbelievably good. London, Tokyo, New York and a host of other cities are recreated in amazing detail, and look really impressive as you zip round them at speed. There's no slow down even if you spin the camera around your car while driving at 200 miles per hour. Without a doubt, this is the best-looking game we've seen, outstripping even the latest PC titles.

We were also provided with a copy of Perfect Dark Zero, a first-person shooter. The game has a cartoon-style look, a bit like Manga, and is absolutely stunning. The textures look great up close and the scale of the levels is breathtaking. While most first-person shooters save on processing power with small enclosed spaces, Perfect Dark Zero puts you in massive warehouses



If only people would appreciate how difficult it is to drive at such a jaunty angle, thought Clive



with rooms that must be hundreds of feet long. This game was smooth to play, though strangely the cut scenes were jerky. Both these games are great fun to play, and should help attract new gamers to the platform.

All the games are designed with Xbox Live in mind. Depending on the titles, you can play online against other humans, upload and compare best performances to help you improve your own. The wireless control pad works exactly as wireless kit should. Press the button on the front of it, and it connects to the Xbox automatically. You can connect up to four control pads. There are dual analogue sticks and a range of other buttons. It's comfortable in the hand and responsive to use.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

While the Xbox 360 is great for games, it can also be used as a Media Center Extender. Once you've installed the free update on your PC, you can use Media Center's interface on the Xbox to access all your media, including images, video, recorded TV and even live TV over the Xbox's built-in Ethernet connection. It works really well, although you'll want a wired network or fast wireless if you're going to use video.

The Xbox 360 is an amazing console. The games look stunning, the Media Center Extender software works just as it should, and there are some great games around now. It's pricy, though, and we wish there was just the one version with a hard disk available.

David Ludlow

✓ Amazing graphics; seamless integration with Media Center; good launch titles

✗ Expensive; requires an HD television for best results

SPECIFICATIONS Games console, DVD drive, Ethernet port, component video cable, wireless control pad